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ABSTRACT

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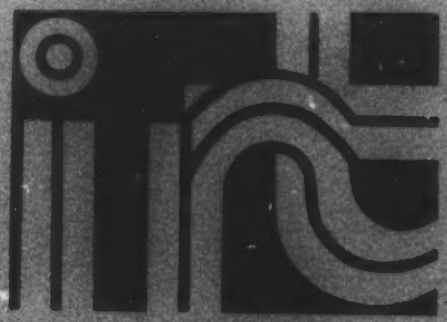
FIGURING IN THE PAST: THINKING ABOUT TEACHER MEMORIES

Margret Buchmann



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Margret Buchmann

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Abstract

Research on teachers and teacher thinking finds itself subject to tensions between two prevailing factions. The first sees promise of progress in the rejection of frequently conservative, idiosyncratic teachers' thoughts; the second embraces those thoughts as expressions of a sacred, lived truth. Detecting conflicting mythologies at the core of this division, the author considers several means by which teachers' memories can be persuaded to yield their fruits: the fruit of structure, which provides a way to organize and retain experiences; and the fruit of quest, which provides an impetus to examine the fruit of structure in order to extract deeper meaning from those experiences. In the process, the author makes use of literary representations and philosophical investigations, concluding that a candid evaluation of researchers' mythologies will recognize them as varieties of meaning-generating faith.

FIGURING IN THE PAST: THINKING ABOUT TEACHER MEMORIES[1]

Margret Buchmann[2]

> We do not have too much intellect and too little soul, but too little intellect in matters of the soul.
> Robert Musil, "Helpless Europe"

Introduction: Ibsen and Company

Having lately returned from Norway, I am full of memories. Landscapes, tapestries, Viking ships, the lilt of the language, the hospitality and kindness of friends, much talking and more thinking. I have also learned a bit about Ibsen and his times. In 1879, the playwright wrote to a friend, "There are at present not as many as 25 free and independent spirits in the whole of Norway. Nor could they possibly exist" (cited in Keel, 1991, p. 122, author's translation). Ibsen then executes a familiar and customary turn, which one might call the pedagogical turn in social and political arguments. Without further ado, he posits an implicit explanation for how people's lack of freedom and autonomy are caused: "I have tried to see and feel from the inside the daily life of schools--modes of instruction, curriculum policies, the content of subject areas, the plans that regulate every hour" (p. 122).

Ibsen's writer friend, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, wrote in the same year: "In our times, in our country, it is utterly impossible to be an intellectual without seeing everything in relation to society; and it is impossible, in turn, to do that without assuming a political or religious standpoint" (cited in Keel, 1991, pp. 122-123, author's translation). In modern countries today, these pedagogical turns in the critique of society and political turns among

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[2]Margret Buchmann, professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is coordinator of the Conceptual Analysis of Teaching Project.

people devoted to the life of the mind are still taken for granted. Note that these turns assume quite a lot about the sources and causes of desirable change, as well as about human freedom and perfectibility. In general, these turns overestimate the role of schools and intellectuals.

Researcher Thinking: Divisions in Tonalities and Politics

Research on teachers and teacher thinking can be seen against this background of pedagogy, perfectibility, politics, and faith. As the Norwegian context is suffused by somber and earnest features, so this variegated body of research and researchers has some peculiarities. Distinct tonalities in researcher thinking remind one of two great narrative movements: One, taking an alarming view of things, involves reactive myths of progress; the other, inclining toward romanticism, is associated with pastoral myths (Frye, 1967). Thus, some researchers recoil from much of what goes on in teachers' minds, because teacher thinking seems rarely transformative, and instead is conservative, idiosyncratic, present-oriented, and narrowly practical (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Jackson, 1986). From an ironic or cynical point of view, mimesis appears to be the nemesis of teaching. Veering from vindication to defense, other researchers attach themselves to teacher's thoughts, even calling them theories, just because those thoughts are personal and grown in "their own gardens" (e.g., Elbaz, 1983; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, 1987).

Each camp is affected by a version of "holy terror." The first ponders the contents and workings of teachers' minds with exasperated fascination and an almost superstitious dread; the other tries to spell those contents out with piety and reverential awe. While the second camp pronounces its defiance--"And we saw what teachers thought and did, and it was good"--the first reverses valuations, riled by the deflating ordinariness and mundanity

of teaching. The queer logic of their factious opposition incapacitates both sides, rendering each motionless. In one camp, researchers do not wish to meddle with teacher thinking, whose expressive truth is sacred; in the other, they are transfixed by a metaphysical refusal to explore truth and rightness as residing in the world, defined as profane.

These fixations translate into politics with disagreements over who the keepers of the faith and the gatekeepers of change are. Those who feel baffled by the stolid immovability of schools (and society) are frustrated precisely because they cast teachers as agents of change, heralds of a new and better order envisioned by intellectuals. Where teacher thinking is valued just because it is what it is, issues of empowerment and self-determination for a (mostly female) profession (often not accorded much status or "voice") are not far below the surface and are sometimes pointedly up front (see, e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Delpit, 1988; Elbaz, 1990).

Teacher Memories: Rainbow or Granite?

On either side of this divide, in tonalities and politics, I see the presence of myth with its normative and meaning-generating content (see Kolakowski, 1972/1989, 1990); that is, opposing views of teachers and teacher thinking come down to conflicting mythologies. I develop a critique of this divide and its implications for teacher education and researcher thinking by looking at issues of memory and learning, interpreting memory broadly as the primordial stuff of being and thinking, feeling and acting, suffused with personal and collective elements. While teacher memories seem to some a heavy, repressive dead hand of the past whose weight accounts for the persistence of unambitious teaching and oppressive social evils, they appear to others as uplifting--a luminous thread of life and personal meaning.

Contrasting mythical pictures of teacher memories implicate the dichotomies of structure and development, individual and society, tradition and imagination, memory and reason, interiority and externality. Associated oppositions grow out of anxieties and concerns: fears of a "deadly" real world, hopes for a transforming--saving--vision above action, and conflicting commitments to the source of that vision and of human progress, whose stimulus and direction derives, in turn, from comparisons of the actual and the ideal.

Opposing views of teachers and teacher thinking thus appear to be rooted in acts of faith; their underlying structure of concern is part of the religious impulse. "Being religious" referred originally to one's being part of an order and state of life spiritually and practically bound by vows; not unrelated to this, more general and transferred senses imply envisioning some higher powers or purposes that give meaning and direction to human destiny. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson may be more up to date than it might at first have seemed.

As Northrop Frye (1967) explains, "The language of concern is the language of myth, the total vision of the human situation, human destiny, human aspirations and fears" (p. 16). The question is whether the growing point of concern--researchers' heartfelt, generative commitments to preserving or fostering human freedom, life, and happiness--is also a growing point of knowledge. Is concern for improvement, like detachment, a precondition for learning? I will approach this tough question, indirectly, by sorting out researcher perspectives on teacher memories (broadly construed) with their entailments and ramifications.

Motley Aspects of Memory

In attempting to sidestep conflicting mythologies and contrary affiliations in research on teachers and teacher thinking, I have chosen something similarly deep and powerful, namely, the poetic truth of a passage in Virginia Woolf's (1928/1956) Orlando. Orlando thinks about human nature, mind, action, uncertainty, and continuity, with memory busy at the center of it all:

> Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite . . .; nature . . . has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag [emphasis added] of odds and ends within us . . . but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that [emphasis added]. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. . . . Thus, the most ordinary movement in the world . . . may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim. . . . Instead of being a single, downright, bluff piece of work . . ., our commonest deeds are set about with a fluttering and flickering of wings, a rising and falling of lights. (pp. 50-51)

Clay and diamonds; rainbow and granite: There is a great deal in this passage, which is evocative, justly observed, and poignant. Consider the last sentence, depicting ordinary actions as taking wing, but uncertainly, half in light, half in darkness: Are they winged, soaring messengers or birds hopelessly caught? Let us turn to the "capricious seamstress."

By giving memory this paradoxical name, Woolf has unsettled our thinking, though with a light touch. She does the same in calling human nature a "perfect rag-bag": Odds and ends go into it, and who knows where they come from or go? A tendency to be capricious conflicts with one's notions of a patient needlewoman sewing straight seams and neat hems, following a given pattern with regular suitable stitches, bent on having no

frayed or unravelling pieces. A seamstress sticks to a task whose outcome and purpose are no mystery--except, of course, where she is capricious.

The homeliness and humor inherent in Woolf's metaphors for human nature and memory provide some relief from their darker sides. A rag-bag may attain perfection, but its state of completion and greatest excellence is still one of its own rather ill assorted and disreputable kind. Yet caprice recalls the remote and smiling unconcern of marvelous Greek gods. It is a state of self-reliant energy and bliss in which justice, good judgment, true need, or the facts of the matter do not count for much. It is a state of youth.

To be capricious is to be lighthearted rather than solemn. It can mean being willful, disorderly, imperious, wayward, and inconstant, but, in any event, moving, changeable, doing and being the unexpected--thus escaping prediction and control. Being subject to sudden, irregular changes will appear to others as being unreliable and intractable. However, one can also see remoteness and fancy as forms of release and capriciousness as a positive power. Elusiveness and animation are appealing. Caprice engenders the unique and surprising. There is a generous and jubilant quality in its freedom.

What do these explorations suggest for the contents and workings of teacher memories? Remembrances are put together from many things, somehow, but they are no objective records, cold, clear, and immovable. Memory, instead, is dense, shifting, sprawling--a kind of "spiritual capital," peculiar to a person, whose income, "in the form of reviewed experience, is merged with the incoming experiences of her continuing life in the present" (Hampshire, 1989, pp. 120-121). As the primordial stuff of being and meaning, feeling and knowing, teacher memories are, to some extent, inventive and--though often deeply rooted--no stranger to flux and fantasy. There is no

simply bleak or rosy scenario here: Cynicism and celebration seem equally inadequate.

Often, however, researchers do not consider the motley aspects of memory, evenly and jointly, in their unquiet, paradoxical union. Rather, they appear drawn to either a gloomy or rosy view of the nature and effects of teacher memories on teacher and pupil learning, as well as on society at large. I question the starkness of these views--their tendency to be unmitigated--as well as their partiality in the descriptive and evaluative senses of the term. In both, partiality contributes to the tyranny of illusions.

Partiality in Vision and Politics

The Oxford English Dictionary defines partiality in its evaluative sense as the quality or character of prejudgment or of being "inclined antecedently to favour one party in a cause, or one side of the question more than another; prejudiced, biased, interested, unfair": Its opposite, then, is being impartial. There is a weaker evaluative sense in which partiality indicates one's being sympathetic or feeling kindly toward a cause, group of people, or side of a question. (Mature concern, of course, is no gush of kindly or sympathetic feeling.) Descriptively, as in the example of an insurance policy covering only a part of one's total loss of property or other damages, something being partial means simply that it is incomplete, that it constitutes a part only, rather than the total.

In research on teachers and teacher thinking, conflicting perspectives on teacher memories are partial in taking sides and in representing only part of the picture. We should try to recognize and rectify these matters because partial pictures of memory--views that are fundamentally incomplete as well as

a matter of bias and partisanship--lead to misleading beliefs and ill-founded practices in teacher preparation and professional development. Yet the attractions of partial, divided views are potent: They rest on their comparative starkness and a feeling of being on the right side. Dwelling underground are myths with normative and meaning-generating content, products of the spiritual life and constitutive elements of culture. Partial, divided views, moreover, lead to exciting programs of (educational) inquiry and action, programs that fire people with a sense that they have found a key to things (how they are caused) and recipes for action (what ought to be done). True in general, this applies to views of teacher memories as follows.

Ramifications and Implications of Partial, Divided Researcher Views

If the contents and workings of teachers' minds are viewed, gloomily, as unhallowed obstructions to progress, as idiosyncratic, conservative, disorderly, and intractable, a central goal of teacher education--if it is not to be doomed--must be their revision, control, extinction--or different recruitment patterns for the profession. On the rosy view of teacher memories as interior luminescence, we must, by contrast, stand back respectfully as teachers accomplish and recount their personal journeys of development and discovery, perhaps helping them to bring out what is hidden, muffled and indistinct, "within," as their tacit knowledge. Researcher perspectives must be a bit off the mark where they portray teachers as either superstitious primitives (waiting for "the word"--for our repair of their false consciousness) or noble savages (better off left alone, and better for all of us); chances are that neither one-eyed description fits most members of that mass occupation.

Several connected conceptual issues call for attention here. First, of course, the facts are neither good nor bad: It is people's reasoning that makes them so. Second, the dark view of teachers and their memories comes with a reactive sense of cause as external, technological control, whereas the rosy view places implicit trust in agent causation, with teachers center stage. Again, senses of causation are not written into the world. Third, although we must often sort out things and their aspects to understand them, distinction is not division. There are indeed dampening and transcendent aspects to people's memories, but it does not follow that diverse aspects do not mingle or that they materialize as separate existences--each, as it were, of one color or reducible to either drabness or irradiating light.

Fourth, researchers' partial views of teachers and their memories are implicitly divided in their attachments to an external versus an internal perspective, equating this analytic, descriptive distinction, in turn, with the evaluative one of good versus bad--although, on opposite sides, valuations continue to be inverted. Finally, the concept of progress featured by the rosy, internal view likewise confounds descriptive and evaluative meanings--progress as the movement, in time, through one's professional and life cycles and progress as positive advance or improvement; one can, however, simply get on in years or decline, with age, in hope and generosity (Buchmann, 1990, pp. 502-505).

Overcoming Partiality Through Metaphor

Faced with conceptual problems so sturdy in their entanglements with each other and with needs and feelings, a fresh, livelier, and more integrated view of memory might help in providing a new approach and sifting through the issues. This was my idea in introducing Woolf's passage, although I judged

that offering an antecedent explanation of my strategy might blunt its effects. Hampshire (1989) contends that the nature of memory almost requires the use of metaphor. Literal descriptions delineate and mark off parts of the involved aspects of memory, thus fostering partial pictures, at least in the descriptive sense. He furthermore argues for using particular kinds of metaphors, which "have to convey the unmechanical and confused connections which intimately link our memories, conscious and unconscious, to each other and which 'colour' all our later experiences and which form the constantly changing and enriched 'background' to later experiences" (p. 121).

In contrast to Leibniz's image of a heap of stones, Hampshire (1989) compares memory to

> a compost heap, in which all the organic elements, one after another as they are added, interpenetrate each other and help to form a mixture in which the original ingredients are scarcely distinguishable, each ingredient being at least modified, even transformed by later ingredients. (p. 121)

With its earthy, organic, partly subterranean (i.e., inaccessible), subject matter, this metaphor adds to Woolf's image of memory's wayward maker. Compost heaps contain a lot of rot and some unconvertible residue, but they are also places of slow disintegration and productive transformation.

Memory as Structure and Quest

Personal memories combine impressive idiosyncratic elements with equally authoritative elements that are shared; Thelen (1973) calls these archetypes--typical views and experiences of teachers, subject matters, and schooling that are anchored in a culture. What is personally meaningful, typically the case, and affirmative of given cultures shapes ineluctably what people think, feel, and do. Teachers are no exception to these rules of common sense, psychology, and sociology. Memories outside the scope of professional education are

relentlessly present and unquestionably compelling. That there is rule-governed behavior does little to lighten up the bleak picture, for those patterns are viewed from an external vantage point that contrasts (social) structure and (individual) development, memory and reason, tradition and imagination, and so on--which makes personal patterns idiosyncratic and cultural patterns conservative.

Against this bad news, consider the fact that memories--conquering time that conquers all--also provide light and warmth, giving one heart and direction, while supplying a sense of community as well as cherished images of rightness ("This is what I ought to do!") and of mastery in life and action ("This is what doing it well looks like!"). What is illuminating, inspiring, and, at least, alive about teacher memories is left out of their inert picture. The roots of childhood, for instance, may be "impacted, interwoven, scrubby, interlocked, fibrous, cankerous, tuberous, ancient, matted" (Drabble, 1980, p. 132). Still they twist and turn, inside, and help provide for life, if not growth.

From Past to Future, Vision to Intention

In considering memory's relations to learning, I am assuming a modified internal perspective involving valuations: One does not consider just any change as evidence of learning. John Donne's (1975) Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions are relevant here as guided exercises in using the visionary powers of contemporary experience and memory and in giving those powers practical effect in spiritual improvement. In the words of a commentator,

> By forcing his reader to use his memories . . ., Donne's Devotions made him probe the eternal; by engaging his understanding, it inspired deep comprehension of spiritual things; such comprehension, in turn, invariably led the reader to the exercise of the will for love. (Raspa, 1975, p. xl)

To illustrate relations of memory to intentions, I will quote from a poem by Coleridge (1817/1951), as he addresses himself to William Wordsworth:

> And when--O Friend! my comforter and guide!
> Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!--
> Thy long sustainéd Song finally closed,
> And thy deep voice had ceased--yet thou thyself
> Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
> That happy vision of belovéd faces--
> Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
> I sate, my being blended in one thought
> (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?). (p. 77)

Coleridge and Donne do not claim only that memories have visionary powers but also that those powers are formative, beyond thought. Remembrance shapes inclinations for feeling and doing. The blending of being and thinking in a steadfast desire or longing for something at present above one--resolve suggesting both firmness of purpose and a process of clearing away doubts and obscurities--is the anticipatory movement toward a union of good sense and feeling that prefigures action by living memory.

Coleridge's parenthesis--"(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)"--inserts abrupt, stirring questions into the flow of yearning memories, which are no self-indulgent musings. The unexpected movement from elegy to inquiry is no digression. It redirects attention, from the past to present and future, from reflection to resolution and a living, breathing desire for the good. The fact that Donne fashioned exercises to be followed--read and imitated--implies a belief that desirable fruits of memory do not come naturally or without care and increasingly perceptive attention. Instead, they require proper observances, some suitable detachment, time, and recollection.

From Experience to Knowledge Through Memories Reviewed

Some intimations of these matters came to me when I first read a wonderful novel by Rebecca West (1966), The Birds Fall Down. In this story of espionage, revolution, conflict of cultures, and love, a mother's joyfully giving a hat to another woman is a memory around which crystallizes a daughter's getting wisdom and understanding--in an extended process of revelation and formation that is both systematic and quirkily random. The woman receiving the gift is the father's mistress, and that fact is unknown, at the time, to the mother and observing child. When first drawn to revisit the event, the daughter is deeply impressed by her mother in her radiant generosity: loved, and the needed image of safety and love. The other woman seems but her mother's foil, not beautiful to the child, yet disturbing in her complacency and nameless fascination.

Over time, a gesture that commanded love and admiration, a gesture of overflowing, self-assured kindness, becomes an emblem of pity and betrayal. With experience, remembrance becomes more aching and detailed, and the passive actors in the past--recipient, onlooker--are invested with more active, significant roles. Chance events precipitate connections: Vague, fragmentary notions fall into place. Remembrance comes at irregular intervals; indirectly, it refashions the daughter's sense of who her parents are, who she is, and where she, and they, stand. The event set in motion a roundabout process of imagination and investigation that corresponds with memories and knowledge and creates memories and knowledge, while preparing the ground for actions and decisions.

In this example, I have outlined a process of fictional learning, that is, the growth of sensibilities that are more just and of questioning and

comprehending powers in a person imagined. At the same time, I have rendered an account of my own movement from the flat, though gripping, surface of experience to more lucid and many-sided understandings in the course of repeated passes through a text. T. S. Eliot's (1920/1964a) description of how one grows as a literary critic is clarifying for both of these cases of learning from memory:

> There is not merely an increase of understanding, leaving the original acute impression unchanged. The new impressions modify [emphasis added] the impressions received from the objects already known. An impression needs to be constantly refreshed by new impressions in order that it may persist at all; it needs to take its place in a system of impressions [emphasis added]. (p. 14)

Yields of Texts and Lives in Shifting Perspectives

The movement from experience to knowledge in serious reading is an iterative process similar to learning from memory reviewed. Barely formed, unexamined feelings, by way of first response, are followed by another reading, in perspective. This term rewards analysis. Perspective, first of all, denotes the act of viewing, as in its meaning of a visible scene or mental view; originally, it signified the science of sight. Perspective also implies a relative position that need not be fixed, hence, a particular point of view in relation to objects, including imaginary or abstract ones. With a true change of perspective, one's views follow suit. The relations of perspective to time are open, since a mental view or outlook can be applied to any extent of time, real or imagined, past or future: Perspective can be a prospect.

As viewing in a literal and metaphorical sense, perspectives require a living, thinking, feeling person and some externalizing movement; only comparative remoteness makes close inspection possible, even on the internal view. Perspectives can be broad in mental grasp and sympathies, yet they

cannot be all-encompassing or neutral. A specified and limited perspective, however, is not the same as a decided view, a settled or unquestionable position. As Dewey (1931/1960) said, outlooks can themselves be looked at:

> One can only see from a certain standpoint, but this fact does not make all standpoints of equal value. . . . One may have affection for a standpoint which gives a rich and ordered landscape rather than for one from which things are seen confusedly and meagerly. (p. 102)

Dewey implies that pairing richness and confusion is as unsatisfactory as joining meagerness to order in perceptions. In evaluating standpoints, he proposes joining generative substantive criteria (diversity, elaboration) to logical ones (structure, direction). A map is well wrought, for example, if it lays out an abundance of well-marked routes and places to go; proper specification provides means for further explorations. Importantly, Dewey suggests that one can become attached to rich and orderly maps or develop a preference and fondness for them.

In responding to text, Frye (1990) argues that initial readings, which follow the narrative, are a mere "collecting of data for understanding" (p. 74), whereas secondary stages of response (not necessarily obliging one to pick up the book again) take the perspective of a whole structure and turn the "wandering through a maze of words into a directed quest" (pp. 74-75). This staged process, Frye concludes, "is the result of living in time, where experience comes first and the consciousness of having had the experience comes later, and sometimes does not come at all" (p. 89). Memories of text and life provide for learning that balances investigation and imagination, being controlled by a respect for the data that are held, and highlighted, in some comprehensive view, itself capable of review. A difference between text

and life is that one's existence is animate: Although it does end, life does not stay put--nor, as it seems, do its memories.

In Lotte in Weimar, Thomas Mann (1939/1982) supplies a summary of these reflections on (teacher) memories as structure and quest. Picture Goethe's Lotte, the beloved of young Werther, returning to Weimar in her middle age. As she rests from her journey, shimmering images of youth and summer come crowding into her mind:

> Yet the strange thing was that all these images and memories had not obtained their extraordinary pointedness and luminosity, their precise fullness of detail, at first hand, so to say. To begin with, mind had by no means been so keen on keeping them in all their particulars; instead, it had been compelled to yield them up only later, piece by piece, word for word, out of its very depths. They had been investigated, restored, painstakingly brought to the surface again with all their appurtenances, varnished brightly and placed, as it were, between candles--for the sake of the meaning they had gained after the fact, against all expectations. (pp. 34-35, author's translation)

We may, in short, be under the spell of memories but their import is not spelled out for us. In an account that lightly moves across centuries, Orlando's life and learning show how there can be a "multitude of things which call for explanation and imprint their message without leaving any hint as to their meaning upon the mind" (Woolf, 1928/1956, p. 115). For her, or him, however, "the image with all its associations," ultimately, "[gives] place to the truth" (p. 107).

Uneasy Acts of Evaluation

In this section, views of teachers and their memories switch from being figure to a supporting role as background in sorting out issues of researcher thinking. Let me set the tone by quoting from Primo Levi's (1975/1984) third memoir, The Periodic Table:

> There are the so-called inert gases in the air we breathe. They bear curious Greek names of erudite derivation which mean "the

> New," "the Hidden," "the Inactive," and "the Alien." . . . They are also called the noble gases--and here there's room for discussion as to whether all noble gases are really inert and all inert gases are noble. (p. 3)

If teacher memories are to be retained and restored for successive viewings, their presence had better be importunate. Hence, there are virtues even to the vices of capricious memory. What does not follow from my revision of memory's inert picture is that all memories are illustrious icons or that all instances of looking back will impart a higher character, more refined perceptions, or nobler intentions to teachers. Not all fidelities accord with purposes of learning. And some memories elude meaning.

So as to procure learning for teachers, memories must satisfy differentiating criteria of value concerning inherent qualities of remembrance as well as qualities of the mind's likely response. Both kinds of qualitative features are related, in that a quality of teacher response may affect the yields of texts and experiences, while substantive characteristics of teacher memories may engender responses more or less productive. I will illustrate these points with Northrop Frye's (1990) discussion of "magical lines" (see pp. 64-66) in poetry. The question is what makes particular passages of life and text not only compelling but fruitful.

Magical Passages: Transports Across Boundaries

In reading a poem, a line or part may detach itself from the whole and stick in memory. Although this is a personal experience, great poetry is public in ways that other memories are not. Many people get caught in the magic of Marvell's "To a green thought in a green shade," or remember Keats's lines in "Ode to a Nightingale" that tell us how the bird's song has

> Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

We can look at these culminating lines for what they suggest about the power of the poet's song, or of our words, to open up vistas. In fact, T. S. Eliot (1920/1964b) maintains that "the ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together" (p. 56).

While it brings a widening from within, the mental gaze is framed as by a window or embrasure in a fortification. It yields some of its sheltered containment to the enchantment of language, however, in which the lure of many hidden, perhaps unconscious, implications of words--including shadows of earlier usages--contradict their apparent inertia. What is thus hidden, alien, and inactive is "precisely what permit[s everyday language] to be used as an instrument of human freedom, as a way of introducing new ideas, new attitudes" (Passmore, 1970, p. 272). Unfortunately, lack of clarity and closure also make room for bewitchment and dangerous allure, since "these very same 'imperfections' allow men to talk nonsense, to confuse, to deceive, to corrupt" (Passmore, 1970, p. 273).

Although there is the poem as a coherent whole, Frye (1990) observes that Keats's couplet "seems to burst through that unity to suggest different orders of existence" (p. 66). He goes on to propose a principle of response which applies to the issue of memory and teacher learning:

> The inference is that there may be something potentially unlimited or infinite in the response to poetry, something that turns on a light in the psyche, so that instead of the darkness of the unknown we see something of the shadows of other kinds of emerging being. (p. 66)

A principle of response <u>to</u> memory can be analyzed in its own right, yet its coming into play is made more likely by teachers' good fortune in encountering

"magical" passages or by qualitative features of memory. With time and attention, one's response to particular passages of life or text may extend indefinitely beyond its context and given orderings of reality--perhaps approaching regions where meaning found is lost again.

In the shelter of night, a student is settling down to read Antigone, surrounded by books. "When the lamp was turned higher," Woolf (1937) writes in The Years, "he saw his work cut out in a sharp circle of bright light from the surrounding dimness" (p. 49). Reading, frowning, he perceived at first nothing but the Greek characters before him--yet slowly

> he caught phrase after phrase exactly, firmly, more exactly, he noted, making a brief note in the margin, than the night before. Little negligible words now revealed shades of meaning, which altered the meaning. He made another note; that was the meaning. His own dexterity in catching the phrase plumb in the middle gave him a thrill of excitement. There it was, clean and entire. But he must be precise; exact; even his little scribbled notes must be clear as print. He turned to this book; then that book. Then he leant back to see, with his eyes shut. . . . He felt as if he had thrown himself down on the turf after running a race. But for a moment it seemed to him that he was still running; his mind went on without the book. It travelled by itself without impediments through a world of pure meaning; but gradually it lost its meaning. (p. 50)

The passage communicates personal effort and excitement in making meaning, the striving for precision and exactitude, as well as the fragility of process and results. If this fictional reader studied Antigone in the original, we must remember that, in a sense, all experience is Greek to us and--briefly incandescent--may revert to darkness and dull surface, Woolf's "rising and falling of lights."

Remembrance is, with text, on a continuum of meaning making and conserving retention involving systems of interpretable signs. Signs whose meaning is capable of being made out are embedded in multiform contexts. Still, there are transports of thought and feeling across boundaries. Every

instance of making meaning implies the opportunity, power, and liberty of a crossing, or some travelling from one place, condition, or form of being to another. Transition and difference are part of the meaning of passage; a corollary is that the strange, although it may be hidden, is never far away.

Meanings Fashioned in Diverse Regions

Picking texts for interpretation and illustration in this essay, I made choices, some involving languages and artistic forms. I could have looked at Rilke's letters or essays by Musil instead of considering verses by Coleridge and Keats; I could have drawn on Goethe's autobiography, Poetry and Truth, instead of the fictional creation Orlando. Choices of text, form, and language are not just ornamental but affect one's points and meanings. Translating the passage from Lotte in Weimar, I spent days with dictionaries and etymologies, trying to catch the charm and meaning with which the German original sparkles. The fascinating thing was that, moving between languages--word choices, variant renderings of phrases and their dependencies--meanings were found as well as lost. As a native speaker, I had not noticed that two German words for memory--Erinnerung, Gedächtnis--also signify inwardness and thinking, respectively, as process and result. Sorting out fringes of meaning increased my conscious repertoire on both sides. I compared light effects, ambiguous overtones, and earthbound strains, yet literal representations rarely succeeded as communication.

Clifford Geertz (1986) puts the point that meanings are fashioned by people in places as follows:

> Meaning, in the form of interpretable signs--sounds, images, feelings, artefacts, gestures--comes to exist only within language games, communities of discourse, . . . ways of world making; . . . it arises within the frame of concrete social interaction in which something is a something for a you and a me, and not in some secret grotto in the head [emphasis added]. (pp. 112-113)

And culture is no matter of select pretensions or time-honored verities but, in the pointed words of Oakeshott (1989),

> a contingent flow of intellectual and emotional adventures, a mixture of old and new where the new is often a backward swerve to pick up what has been temporarily forgotten; a mixture of the emergent and the recessive; of the substantial and the somewhat flimsy, of the commonplace, the refined and the magnificent. (p. 29)

Culture seems just as motley in character as personal memories.

Looking at cultures as collective memories, Dewey (1931/1960) distinguishes between "blind customs" and traditions with their intellectual qualities: "Traditions are ways of interpretation and of observation, of valuation, of everything explicitly thought of. They are the circumambient atmosphere which thought must breathe; no one ever had an idea except as he inhaled some of this atmosphere" (p. 100). Oakeshott's variegated list of cultural characteristics and Dewey's firm distinction drive home the need for discriminations, or the drawing of distinctions in making and responding to meaning, so as to determine when teacher memories may eventuate in learning.

The Vitality of Distinctions and Evaluations

Distinctions enshrine the conceptual order of languages and cultures, supporting and expressing forms of life, probably with some universal, species-related underpinnings. To that extent, conceptual distinctions have permanence and act as a conservative force. At the same time, distinctions supply conditions for learning. Knowing and questioning things depends on their being differentiated, in some illuminating way, and on granting that there are possibilities for faulty differentiation.

From the assertion that everything is what it is and not something else--tradition is not blind custom, structure not the same as quest, beliefs not mere wishes--it does not follow that opposites have no connections or

mutual dependencies: People must often distinguish where they cannot divide. Objections against dichotomies are therefore not justified by their being cases of faulty differentiation but invoke their built-in refusal to admit of relations between paired opposites. Nor does the presence of troubling tensions--between the actual and the ideal, rigidity and the forces of change--imply that final, harmonious resolutions are possible.

Maintaining that distinctions are vital is not to say that facts and values, for example, are not often entangled. They are. We are not equally interested in all facts. We consider truth to be better than falsehood. Yet from the likelihood of matters being tangled, it does not follow that they are homogeneous or that they can be confounded with one another. In particular, it will not do to confuse descriptive distinctions, such as that between internal and external points of view, with the evaluative distinctions of good and bad or right and wrong. Where conversions of distinctions into divisions go hand in hand with failures to uphold appropriate distinctions, fantasies and misconceptions are the result, while myths turn into ideologies or tendentiously twisted tales.

Dialectical Value Judgments

Frye's concept of magical lines dramatizes issues of memory and (teacher) learning and exemplifies evaluative considerations bearing on substantive qualities of memory and qualities of response. If magical passages of text and life are special, they are so in a positive or, at least, appealing sense. Of course, something can be an exception to the rule and located at the negative end of the evaluative spectrum; such placements, too, are acts affirming value. The point is not only that valuations are diverse and consequential, that such determinations have to be made and learned, but

that their diversity is structured in terms of degrees and kinds, as well as complicated by interrelations, including issues of truth and rightness.

In trying to determine how poetic assent may be conditioned (do we have to agree with Shakespeare's renderings of differences between men and women, for instance, to appreciate Antony and Cleopatra?), Heller (1988) considers the absence of what is valuable. Involved are, again, both inherent poetic qualities and qualities of people's response. The interplay of text and response characteristics is mediated by readers' attention to epistemological criteria, or the degree to which what is asserted or implied seems worthy of belief. Heller concludes that epistemological value is required not only for appreciation but for poetic production itself:

> There are ideas and beliefs so prosaic, outlandish or perverse at their core that no great or good poetry can come from them. . . . It is this negative consideration that to me finally proves the intimate positive relation between belief, thought and poetry. (p. 112, footnote)

There remains room for doubt, however, for, as Wittgenstein notes in Culture and Value,

> Nietzsche writes somewhere that the best poets and thinkers, too, have written things that are mediocre or bad, yet that they have set aside what is good. But it's not altogether like that. In his garden, a gardener does not only keep roses, of course, but manure, rubbish and straw; what makes here for difference, however, is not [inherent] goodness but, above all, function in the garden. (Wittgenstein, 1977, p. 59, author's translation)

Interminably complex and demanding, though not without groundings, acts of evaluation in making meaning ought not to come easy to teachers or researchers. "How much less burdensome," Oakeshott (1989) comments, "to be incapable of error, of stupidity, of hatred and of wrongdoing, even if this meant the surrender of truth, wisdom, love and virtue" (p. 20). Yet there is no escape. Thus Strawson (1962/1974) observes in "Freedom and Resentment":

> It is an exaggerated horror, itself suspect, which would make us unable to acknowledge the facts because of the seamy side of the facts. . . . We have to take account of the facts in all their bearings. . . . This is in no way to deny the possibility and desirability of redirection and modification. . . . But we may reasonably think it unlikely that our progressively greater understanding of certain aspects of ourselves will lead to the total disappearance of those aspects. (p. 25)

Conflicts and limitations do not distort but express human nature.

Myth and Detachment in Their Right Place

By care, pains, chance, and nameless fascination, memory may procure learning. But, if teacher memories beat back change, that need not always be fatal. Nor does it follow that, if memories are irrefragable, teachers are refractory, obstinate, or perverse. In research on teachers and teacher thinking, in sum, we need searching acts of appraisal that confront memory's conflicting aspects as structure and quest, as well as researcher needs and fantasies.

Tempering partial, divided views of teachers and their memories should lead to sensibilities that are more just, dispelling some gloom and purple haze without diminishing inherent tensions. For all parties, gaining keen awareness and emotional consciousness will entail paying attention to the internal point of view but not letting it go unexamined, thus heeding the external point of view, while not letting it swallow up everything (see Nagel, 1979, chap. 14). Mutually necessary, these opposing perspectives do not furnish grounds for partisanship and political faction; instead, each is, in itself, simply what it is--vindicating neither teachers' rights nor scientific utopias.

Neither anxiety nor indifference, the proper attitude toward teacher memories is concern. In being concerned, one has a commitment to well-being but no blind attachment to the given contents of teachers' minds, the social

setting, or one's hopes and ideals. The imperfections one ought to expect all around prompt careful efforts at understanding and improvement, not rejection or denial. Moreover, one's respect for the integrity of truth and people forbids transforming facts and meanings to meet one's own wishes and needs. Detachment is thus involved in being concerned and in coming to know, both of which presuppose some selfless attention and a recognition of independence.

Distinguishing truth and rightness from fantasy and epistemological from political fervor is consistent with giving the proper place to myth, faith, and concern. Yet in research and scholarship, the question is not, Whose side are you on?, but What makes conceptual, empirical, and ethical sense?--which seem to be self-renewing questions grounded in traditions and myths. What is true for philosophy is also true for educational research; as Kolakowski (1990) reminds us, it is "the spirit of truth" itself which requires that we never "forget that there are questions that lie beyond the legitimate horizon of science and are nonetheless crucially important to the survival of humanity as we know it":

> All the most traditional worries of philosophers--how to tell good from evil, true from false, real from unreal, being from nothingness, just from unjust . . ., or how to find order in chaos, providence in absurdity, timelessness in time, laws in facts, God in the world, world in language--all of them boil down to the quest for meaning [emphasis added]; and they presuppose that in dissecting such questions we may employ the instruments of reason, even if the ultimate outcome is the dismissal of reason or its defeat. (p. 135)

It is no good to deny mythologies or to annex them to reason. Instead, educational researchers and scholars should make their mythologies clearer and see them for what they are: neither more, nor less, than varieties of meaning-generating faith.

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